



Commission on Children and Youth 2011-2012 Annual Report

**Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Health and Human Services**





Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Board of Education and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding and legislative priorities; and (4) advocating for all the County's young people by affirming their needs, aspirations and achievements.



A Letter from the Chair

Greetings to the Montgomery County Executive, County Council, Department of Health and Human Services, Board of Education, and County residents from the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth! We are pleased to share with you some of the wonderful activities and accomplishments of the Commission this past year in this, our annual report.

In 2011-2012, the Commission continued to advocate for the availability of and accessibility to mental health and sexual reproductive health services, including freer exchange of information in the MCPS 8th and 10th grade Health Curriculum, permanency for adolescents in the care of Child Welfare Services and ways to improve the entry into a new school for recently placed youth, and quality technical education programs that prepare students for careers and postgraduate education in technical fields. In addition, we continued to highlight the promotion of resource awareness among youth in our community; in collaboration with the Interagency Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy (ICAP), we distributed 45,000 Teen Help Cards to MCPS high school students. Our Child Welfare Committee collaborated with several partners to produce a video targeted at potential foster parents.

Of particular note was the success of our two annual events: the fifth Youth Having A Voice Roundtable and the twenty sixth Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards. Held in November, the Roundtable received positive internal and external feedback. It was envisioned by Commission members in 2008 as a forum to hear directly from youth-serving agencies and the children and youth participating in their programs. We also see it as a model environment in which community stakeholders 'listen' to the County's young people to better understand and address their psychosocial and educational needs. This year, the focus was on sources of stress affecting students in the LGBT community. We were fortunate to have youth from several County high schools and The American University participate. The Nancy Dworkin Awards, established to acknowledge members of the community who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help and guide our young people, received an unprecedented number of qualified entries and it was standing room only at the March awards ceremony.

The Commission advocated strongly for continued support for the County's critical youth-serving programs and to constructively recommend ways to fund and collaborate among agencies. We have met with members of the County Council, the Board of Education, Dr. Josh Starr, Ms. Kate Garvey, MCPS staff, as well as other leaders in the County.

The Commission is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. We look forward to working with you again this year. Please feel free to contact the Commission to inform us about how we may best support your efforts and partner to benefit the County's children and youth.

Sincerely,



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Membership

Commission Year 2011—2012

Youth Representatives

Alexander DiMisa — Gonzaga College High School
John Gallagher — Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
Sarah Goldberg — Sidwell Friends School
Arvand Homer — Richard Montgomery High School
Jessica Maxin — Thomas Wootton High School
Megan Yan — Richard Montgomery High School
Zack Young — Richard Montgomery High School

Parent Representatives

David Anderson
Jane de Winter
Stuart Grossman
Kelcey Klass
Vicki Stearn
Don Wynne

Private Agency Representatives

Shari Argue — Lourie Center Early Head Start
Dana Bell — Phillips School — Laurel
JoAnn Binko-Sanders — Family Support Center, Inc.
Carson Henry — YMCA Youth & Family Services
Nancy Kaplan — Private Nursery School Community
Alies Muskin — Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Deatrice Williams - Infant & Toddler Connection of Alexandria/Alexandria Parent Infant Education Program

Public Agency Representatives

Larissa Halstead — Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Child Welfare Services
Deborah Fagan — Montgomery County Public Schools
Melinda McCartin — HHS, Public Health Services
Elizabeth Ortega-Lohmeyer — Montgomery County Department of Recreation

Program Manager

Mary E.L. Gies, HHS



Commission Structure

The Commission on Children and Youth (Commission) was established in 1978 by Montgomery County Code Section 27-48. Its purpose is to advise the County Executive, County Council, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Board of Education (BOE) on the development of coordinated community and government policies, programs, and services which support children, youth and families.

The Commission's mission is to promote the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults. The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, County Council, HHS, the BOE and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding and legislative priorities; and (4) advocating for all the County's young people by affirming their needs, aspirations and achievements.

The Commission has 27 members including one representative from the public school system; one representative from the private schools in the County; one representative from the Department of Recreation; and two representatives from HHS. The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience in agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents. **The Commission on Children and Youth is the only HHS commission with youth members.**

In 2011-2012, the Commission had three sub-committees: Child Welfare, Health and Wellness, and School Climate and Education. There are youth, parent, public agency and private agency representatives on each of the three sub-committees.

The Commission's sub-committee structure can change from year to year. The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and wide reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat and selects two to three priority issues for the year. Sub-committees are formed around the selected priorities. The 2011-2012 sub-committee structure has been in place for two years.

The Commission also forms the following ad hoc sub-committees each year:

- Youth Having a Voice Roundtable Planning Committee
- Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Planning Committee
- Membership/Nomination Committee
- Strategic Planning Retreat Committee

The Commission meets on the second Wednesday of the month from 6:00 PM — 9:00 PM. Meetings are generally held in the 1st Floor Conference Rooms at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville. The Commission breaks into standing sub-committees at approximately 6:45 PM and reconvenes at 7:45 PM. Meetings are open to the public.



Commission Activities

- Transmitted a letter to Christopher S. Barclay, President, BOE and Dr. Joshua Starr, Superintendent, MCPS, about the need for quality technical education in Montgomery County. (July 1, 2011)
- Participated in a worksession with the Health and Human Services Committee of the Montgomery County Council to discuss how the County advisory boards and commissions can further the Council's policy priorities. The Commission stated its three policy priorities for the year, which included increasing permanency for children in foster care, increasing youth education about and access to sexual and reproductive health services, and increasing access to school counselors for behavioral and mental health supports. (October 6, 2011)
- Submitted fiscal year 2013 (FY13) policy priorities, which included increasing permanency for children in foster care, increasing youth education about and access to sexual and reproductive health services, and increasing access to school counselors for behavioral and mental health supports, at the HHS Community Budget Forum. (October 19, 2011)
- Hosted the 5th *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable*, which highlighted points of stress for youth in the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community so that the Commission could bring this information to decision makers and advocate for change. Please see **page 12** for a summary of this event. (November 9, 2011)
- Transmitted a letter to Valerie Ervin, President, Montgomery County Council and Phil Andrews, Chair, Public Safety Committee, expressing its concerns with County Council Bill 25-11 - Offenses - Curfew — Established. (November 30, 2011)
- Partnered with ICAP to print and distribute **45,000** Teen Help Cards to MCPS high school students. (Fall 2011/Winter 2012)
- Met with Dr. Laura Newton, Supervisor, School Counseling Services, MCPS and Dr. Brenda Wilks, Director, Department of Student Services, MCPS, to discuss identifying and promoting methods to make counselors more accessible to high school students beyond class scheduling and college testing and admissions; increasing awareness among counselors at the middle and high school level about technical and career education programs within MCPS, communicating this information to students along with opportunities for internships, apprenticeships and college-level programs leading to career certificates; information on how the MCPS policy on student counseling is evaluated and revised; increasing access to sexual health education and information in middle and high schools; and identifying and promoting methods to increase communication between MCPS and Child Welfare Services around children placed in foster care. (December 14, 2011)



Commission Activities

Continued...

- Submitted written testimony to the BOE on FY13 budget priorities for MCPS, which encouraged the BOE to focus on improving and expanding behavioral health support, counseling, and guidance to students, evaluating and revising technical education programs, and creating innovative partnerships to support after-school programs. (January 18, 2012)
- Youth Commissioner Megan Yan presented verbal testimony to the BOE about the importance of school counselors as behavioral and mental health supports for youth. (January 18, 2012)
- Presented its FY13 policy and budget priorities to the County Executive at his annual meeting with Boards, Committees, and Commissions. (February 23, 2012)
- Transmitted a letter to Shirley Brandman, President, BOE and J. Thomas Manger, Chief of Police, Montgomery County Police Department, with recommendations about the implementation of County Council Bill 37-11 - Motor Vehicles and Traffic - School Bus Safety Cameras. (March 14, 2012)
- Hosted the 26th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. (March 14, 2012) Please see **page 15** for additional information on this uplifting event.
- Youth Commissioner Alexander DiMisa presented a youth perspective on the County Executive's Recommended FY13 Operating Budget to the County Council. (April 12, 2012)
- Met with Dr. Joshua Starr, Superintendent, MCPS, to acquaint him with the work of the Commission and to discuss the parts of our work plan that involve the school system. Dr. Starr intends to attend a Commission meeting in 2012-2013. (May 2, 2012)
- Prepared an extensive report to meet the requirements established by Montgomery County Council Bill No. 32-11, which mandated each advisory board to submit to the Committee Evaluation Review Board a report outlining reasons why the advisory board should continue. (May 6, 2012)
- Hosted a meeting with David Fishback, Advocacy Chair, DC Metro PFLAG and Stephanie Kreps, founder of the Rainbow Youth Alliance, to discuss available resources for LGBT youth. (May 9, 2012)
- Transmitted a letter to Dr. Joshua Starr and Shirley Brandman supporting the inclusion of language to the Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality units of the MCPS 8th and 10th grade health education curriculum. (June 15, 2012) Please see **Appendix B**.



Committee Summaries

Child Welfare Committee (CWC)

The primary goals of the CWC in 2011 – 2012 were to identify and implement initiatives to improve the foster care process in Montgomery County. This was a continuation of work begun in 2010-2011. By spearheading steps to ensure efficient and effective collaboration between Child Welfare Services, MCPS, faith based organizations, foster parent recruiting agencies and other constituents, the CWC aligned these entities in order to improve the foster parent recruiting process itself, and to increase awareness of this program in general.

The CWC worked with Tom Hoopengardner, Glen Echo Associates, LLC, to produce the video “Fostering Teens,” which will be used in the foster parent recruiting process. The video includes encouraging and inspirational testimony by foster parents and children about how foster relationships have touched their lives. Commissioners Larissa Halstead and Carson Henry facilitated a meeting between Mr. Hoopengardner and Erin Stillwell, Specialized Recruiter, Montgomery County Child Welfare Services, to review the final cut of the video and brainstorm how to fund the duplication of the video and on how to channel and distribute it as part of the recruiting process.

Additionally, the CWC continued to collaborate with Deborah Fagan, a Commissioner and Pupil Personnel Worker (PPW) with MCPS, about improving the communication process between MCPS and Child Welfare Services, specifically as it relates to newly placed foster children. Ms. Halstead and Ms. Fagan have discussed the importance of having PPWs work closely with Child Welfare Services’ social workers to discuss items relating to newly placed foster children, (i.e. medical needs, transportation logistics, legal matters, behavioral issues, etc) in order to ensure a smooth transition of a child to a new school. Other items of discussion included how to improve life opportunities for foster children as they mature into young adults (i.e. academic enrichment, etc), and how to ensure foster children’s lives are not disrupted during/outside of school.

The CWC brought constituents together and facilitated dialogue to improve and streamline the recruiting process for foster parents, generate mass awareness of the foster care program within the County, align the interests of all stakeholders associated with foster care and provide for the well-being, at home and at the school, of all children placed in foster care.





Committee Summaries

Continued...

Health and Wellness Committee (HWC)

The primary goals of the HWC in 2011 – 2012 were to continue advocating for access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, work to obtain principal buy-in and bring more information to middle school students, and advocate on behalf of LGBT youth.

The HWC completed tasks to further its agenda, which included:

- Compiling a comprehensive table of reproductive health service providers in Montgomery County, which was used to demonstrate that many service providers do not actually provide services, just referrals, and that providers are geographically clustered in Silver Spring and Gaithersburg. The table was provided to the County Council.
- Meeting with the League of Women Voters (LWV) to provide information on reproductive health services for their current study on the subject. The LWV report is to be issued in spring 2012 and the HWC will review and submit comments and recommendations.
- Following up on the suggestion from Dr. Laura Newton, Supervisor, School Counseling Services, MCPS and Dr. Brenda Wilks, Director, Department of Student Services, MCPS to engage principals in an effort to increase access to sexual health education and information in middle and high schools.
- The HWC initiated communication with the MCPS Office of School Support and Improvement to identify the most appropriate venue to meet with school principals to discuss issues relating to the work of both the HWC and the CWC.





Committee Summaries

Continued...

School Climate and Education Committee (SCEC)

The SCEC spent a good deal of time this year researching, reviewing, discussing, identifying and promoting methods to make counselors more accessible to high school students beyond class scheduling and college testing and admissions and on how the MCPS policy on student counseling is evaluated and revised based on current student populations within schools.

In addition, the SCEC continued to focus its efforts on bolstering the Commission's relationship with the BOE and ensuring that leaders within the school system hear from youth on policy and budget matters. To this end, the CWC, which enjoys heavy involvement from the Commission's youth members, facilitated a meeting between the Commission and members of the BOE and worked diligently to prepare testimony and letters to school officials. Youth members of the SCEC also presented their stories and recommendations at public hearings. Please see Appendix A for a sample.

Ad Hoc Sub-Committees

The following ad hoc sub-committees met throughout the year to accomplish specific objectives:

- *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable Planning Committee* — Coordinated the logistical details and content of the Commission's annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable.
- *Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Planning Committee* — Planned and implemented the annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards program, which recognizes distinguished individuals and organizations in our community who dedicate their energy and talents to caring about and serving young people, and coordinate the recognition ceremony.
- *Membership/Nomination Committee* - Identified membership needs in terms of diversity, expertise and skills; identified openings; assisted the County Executive in recruiting; interviewed applicants; recommended new members for the Commission to the County Executive; and pursued nominations for Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission.
- *Strategic Planning Retreat Committee* - Established the date, location, goals and agenda of the Commission's annual strategic planning retreat.



Community Events and Forums



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth hosted its 5th *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* on November 9, 2011 at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The Commission was pleased that leaders in the community were able to attend and demonstrate their commitment to support and advance the wellbeing of Montgomery County's children, youth and families.

The Roundtable was established in 2008 as an opportunity for 1) youth to bring a voice to their experiences; 2) the Commission to gather testimony that strengthens its work; 3) County leaders to hear the concerns of the community's young people; 4) organizations to raise awareness about their programs and the needs of youth who access their services; and, 5) the Commission to inform the larger community about critical issues faced by our County's youth.

The purpose of this year's discussion was to highlight points of stress for youth in the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community so that the Commission can bring this information to decision makers and advocate for change. Brave and candid youth, both LGBT and straight, from Walter Johnson High School, Blair High School, Northwood High School, the Gandhi Brigade and American University participated in the lively dialogue. The Commission's youth members did an outstanding job facilitating this very personal and difficult topic.

There were several areas that grabbed the Commission's attention and sparked ideas for change:

Self Acceptance

Youth participants expressed their fears about coming out to friends and family. For example, one student said that she was afraid that her parents would hate her after learning she was a lesbian. However, many said that coming out to *oneself* is the hardest part of the process. One student shared, "Telling myself that 'it's normal' is a lot harder than telling someone else." One of the non-LGBT students commented that people are the same before and after they come out. But an LGBT youth said that was not true. He says he really was different because, since he didn't have to hide, he could relax and let his 'real' self shine through.

Coming out to one's self or understanding one's identity can be made more difficult when students do not have LGBT role models in their lives, whether at school or in their communities. Students emphasized that they themselves often have difficulty envisioning what a life as an LGBT person would look like.

The Commission feels that policy makers and educators should keep in mind the needs of LGBT youth, and all youth, for self assurance and confidence to be themselves by creating cultures and environments, both in schools and the larger community, that celebrate individuals and promote self-acceptance on every level.



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

Continued...

Support in Schools and from Peers

Participants discussed at-length their need for support within schools. It seems that some student members of the LGBT community sometimes feel bullied or ignored by some teachers or perceive that teachers are condoning bullying by other students. One student shared a story about a teacher who punished her when she tried to defend herself after a classmate used the word “gay” in a derogatory manner in the classroom and, the disparaging remark was overlooked. She said it hurt to have the teacher, someone she looked up to, ignore her right to defend herself. She said it broke the student/teacher bond and affected her learning, “You can watch my grade go down [after the incident].” Other students agreed that while some teachers are incredibly supportive, others ignore bullying and even laugh at offensive jokes.

In response to this feedback, the Commission recommends that teachers and school staff are more fully educated about this issue. A \$20 Safe Space Kit was recommended as a training resource. It is designed to help educators create a safe learning environment for LGBT youth. The kit features the 42-page *Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students*. This guide provides concrete strategies for supporting LGBT students, educating about anti-LGBT bias and advocating for changes in schools. The kit also shows how to assess the school's climate, policies and practices, and outlines ways to advocate for change inside the school. Additional information can be found at www.SafeSpaceKit.com. Also, we encourage schools to allow youth members of the LGBT community to address faculty regarding any bullying they experience.

Roundtable participants brainstormed further ideas for schools to support LGBT youth. They suggest that different types of families other than the two parent heterosexual model be introduced in elementary schools, for example through counselor presentations, so that children grow up knowing that all different types of families exist. They also recommend that middle school health classes familiarize students with alternative lifestyles. Faculty and the parent community should recognize that they are important role models for students as they envision their future. Exposure to LGBT faculty and their families, or being aware that there are students with same sex-parents in their school are powerful messages.

The Commission also learned the importance of support from non-LGBT students. Many young people are still unaware of the issues their LGBT peers are experiencing. One member of the Gandhi Brigade stated, “I’m on the other side, I didn’t know these things. You should share your stories. I didn’t know teachers said those things...I didn’t know how much saying ‘gay’ hurt.” A lesbian participant responded with, “What makes us feel so comfortable is how people ‘on the other side’ act. We need support.” The youth really learned from one another at this event and are planning to work together on a media project to educate other students. Additionally, straight students who are friends with LGBT students said that they are often the target of bullying at their schools.



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

Continued...

The national “It Gets Better” campaign has been very successful in providing youth with positive messages about their future. The roundtable participant from The American University echoed the theme of “It Gets Better” pointing out that many colleges can be a vastly more open and tolerant atmosphere for LGBT youth and that just knowing this fact helps LGBT youth feel more positive about their own futures. It was also pointed out that there is variation among colleges as to the level of acceptance and that LGBT students should be educated to look for such things as the existence of an LGBT student organization or Gender Studies Department or prominent LGBT faculty at prospective colleges as signs of an accepting atmosphere when considering post-secondary education.

Cultural Barriers

The Commission learned from roundtable participants that culture can be a major barrier to acceptance and tolerance of LGBT youth. While the Commission knows that all students need social-emotional support, we would urge faculty and counselors to be especially aware that certain students may face severe family disapproval and have different needs than students whose families are more accepting.

The Internet as Ally

The Commission went into this discussion expecting to hear that the internet and social media make LGBT students more vulnerable to bullying and emotional abuse. Although cyber-bullying does exist and is problematic, we learned that the web, particularly You Tube, gives LGBT students a safe space for self-expression and to seek out like-minded individuals without fear of persecution. We also learned that young people often first turn to the internet before friends and family for support and information when coming out.

As you can see the discussion was lively and the young people learned from one another and made new contacts. We hope that you take the lessons learned and use them to guide policies and practices to support and protect the young members of the LGBT community. Do not hesitate to contact us if you want additional information about the goals of the Commission or the roundtable. Our members look forward to continuing to partner with you on issues related to children, youth and families.



Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth held its 26th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony on Wednesday, March 14, 2012 at the Adventure Theatre in historic Glen Echo Park. The event was co-sponsored by the Gazette Newspapers and Adventure Theatre.

The Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony is designed to recognize individuals, organizations and businesses whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. There are six award categories: Business, Volunteer, Service Provider, Organization, Youth and Child Advocate. In selecting the award recipients, the Awards Committee considered the quality of service, length of time for which services were provided, number of children and youth benefiting from the service and impact to diverse communities.

This year's award winners were:

- Rockville resident **Marty Berger**, a teacher at the Bullis School in Potomac, received the Child Advocate award for his work impacting the lives of over ten thousand children as a teacher, advisor, camp director, and more;
- Gaithersburg-based **Sports Plus**, was honored in the Organization category for offering comprehensive athletic programs for children and young adults with autism, ADD/ADHD and other developmental disabilities;
- Germantown resident **Madeleyne Castaneda**, a family support worker with Family Services, Inc., was honored in the Service Provider category for mentoring and teaching young women, guiding them as they achieve goals, including learning English, graduating from high school, and/or finding employment, while learning to provide a safe, healthy, and educational environment for their young children.
- Silver Spring resident **Tanya Lee** was honored in the Volunteer category for her work with First Book Montgomery County. First Book promotes family literacy by providing children from low-income families the opportunity to read and own their first set of new books; and,
- Gaithersburg resident **Naomi Jones** was honored in the Youth category. An eighth grader, Jones has a passion for helping children, specifically working to end child hunger.

The award is named in memory of Nancy Dworkin, past Chairperson of the Commission, who died in 1987. Nancy was the director of the Center for Unique Learners, a Rockville school for children with learning disabilities. Her upbeat teaching philosophy focused on "teaching to strength" and encouraging all students to develop skills and reach their own potential. This philosophy echoes our purposes in establishing this Awards Program - encouraging us all to reach our own potential for service to others.





Appendices

Verbal Testimony presented to the Montgomery County Board of Education by Megan Yan, Youth Representative January 18, 2012

Good evening. My name is Megan Yan, and I am a junior at Richard Montgomery High School. I am here tonight representing the Commission on Children and Youth, which is the only Health and Human Services Commission with youth members. Thank you for taking the time to hear our recommendations on the superintendent's proposed operating budget.

We have submitted a written testimony focusing on three main issues:

- improving and expanding behavioral health support, counseling and guidance to students;
- evaluating and revising technical education programs; and
- creating innovative partnerships to support after-school programs.

But tonight, I would like to talk about just one: counseling, an area which I've had much experience with.

I'm fifteen years old. I don't know how many of you remember your high school years, but being 15 is hard. There's the constant stress over who you are as a person, who you want to be as a person, not to mention all of society's influences — peer pressure, academic stress, social pressures, and so forth.

We appreciate that Montgomery County provides counselors meant to aid students in dealing with these issues and we applaud increased efforts this past fall to strengthen counseling programs at schools. However, I have to stress that counseling continues to be an issue for most students.

The counselors at my school and at the schools of my friends are there, but we've all begun to see them as people there just for course scheduling. Yes, scheduling and academics are important, and the main function of a counselor is to provide aid and support for students, but the general perception has become "these are people who schedule courses for us and tell us when our GPA's too low." I have friends who've had emotional issues and home issues they couldn't go to anyone for and when I advised that they take it to their counselor, they told me they didn't know that their counselor was an available resource.

This perception needs to change and this change needs to start with the staff. If there's one thing I know about teenagers it's that bottling up problems is the easiest way to cope in a fast-moving environment. But as you can all guess, it is never ever a healthy way to cope with emotional and mental stress.

I recall, from my elementary school days, how much more available counselors were — giving us class demonstrations, holding group sessions. Do you know that in a 6-7 hour school day, the only real time we have to go see our counselors is during lunch? And even this is hard to manage.

Appendix A continued...

Tonight, I want to stress that students are never and should never be just a GPA. We are functioning human beings, the future of society as I've heard numerous times, and it's time we are given a voice.

The counselor *should*, by all means, be a great resource. But the reality of the situation is that it's become a stereotypical adult figure. We need counselors asking students with low GPAs if anything is going on at home, if they're having any issues. We need counselors meeting with students at the beginning of the year to say hi and let them know that yes, while they do manage scheduling, they are always there to give support if necessary.

Montgomery County schools and counselors have shown great response to crises — dealing with students who are at risk for suicide, kids who are severely depressed, etc. But we can't wait for a crisis to happen.

Checking and communicating with students needs to happen at every level, at every step in the journey. Being a teenager is difficult, but it shouldn't have to always be that way.

We urge the county to consider the importance of counselors and the key role they could and should play in students' lives as they make budget decisions from here on out. We ask you to protect the initiatives that will do the most good for the most students. I, on behalf of the entire Commission on Children and Youth, thank you for your time and attention. Please do not hesitate to call on us for any assistance.

Letter to Montgomery County Public Schools and the Montgomery County Board of Education in Support of Additions to the Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality Units of the MCPS 8th and 10th Grade Health Education Curriculum

June 15, 2012

Dear Dr. Starr and President Brandman,

The Commission on Children and Youth supports the inclusion of the following language in the Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality units of the MCPS 8th and 10th Grade Health Education Curriculum:

- Homosexuality is not a disease or a mental illness [N.B.: Teachers currently can only convey this in response to a question]. (1)
- The American Medical Association opposes ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapies that are based upon the assumption that homosexuality is a mental disorder or that an individual should change his/her homosexual orientation. (2)
- Children raised by same-sex couples do just as well as those raised by heterosexuals, and are no more likely to be homosexual. (3)
- Homosexuals can live happy, successful lives; they can be successful parents.

The Commission also supports introducing different kinds of family structures, including families with same-sex parents, in the 2nd grade; and defining sexual orientation as the romantic attraction of an individual to someone of the same gender or different gender, in the fifth grade. At this time, both topics are introduced in the eighth grade. This change would align the MCPS curriculum with the National Sexuality Education Standards, Core Content and Skills, K-12, a special publication of the Journal of School Health. (4)

The Commission believes the addition of this language is a critical first step to creating environments that celebrate individuals and promote self-acceptance. This is essential, as the Commission learned at its November 2011 Youth Having a Voice Roundtable that some LGBT youth feel unable to be themselves and allow their “real self [to] shine through” for fear of judgment and bullying. LGBT youth need support within schools. We heard that some student members of the LGBT community at times feel bullied at school. If bullying behavior is ignored by staff, LGBT youth see that as tacit condoning of bullying. Teachers need to be able to speak the truth about sexual orientation to ensure that all students are valued and feel safe in school.

Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Jane de Winter, Chair

(1) The American Psychiatric Association (1973). *Position Statement on Homosexuality and Civil Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychiatry.org/advocacy-newsroom/position-statements/apa-position-statements>

(2) American Medical Association (2008). *Policy H-160.991 Health Care Needs of the Homosexual Population*. Retrieved from <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/glbti-advisory-committee/ama-policy-regarding-sexual-orientation.page>

(3) American Academy of Pediatrics (2005). *Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Parents: Information for Children and Parents* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://www.smithtownpediatrics.com/files/40259881.pdf>

(4) <http://www.ashaweb.org/files/public/Sexuality%20Education/JOSH-FoSE-Standards.pdf>



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Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

***Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in
employment or in the admission or access to its programs or services.***

